

Extremist Shiites

The Ghulat Sects



Matti Moosa


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To
Hans, Mark, Petra, and Jessica
With Love

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Contents

Preface	ix
Introduction	xiii
1 The Shabak	1
2 The Bektashis	10
3 The Safawis and Kizilbash	21
4 The Bektashis, the Kizilbash, and the Shabak	36
5 The Ghulat's "Trinity"	50
6 The Miraculous Attributes of Ali	66
7 The Family of the Prophet	77
8 Religious Hierarchy	88
9 The Twelve Imams	92
10 The Abdal	110
11 Rituals and Ceremonies	120
12 Social Customs	144
13 Religious Books	152
14 The Bajwan and Ibrahimiyya	163
15 The Sarliyya-Kakaiyya	168
16 The Ahl-i Haqq (Ali Ilahis): <i>Origin and Identity</i>	185
17 The Ahl-i Haqq: <i>Cosmology and Cosmogony</i>	194
18 Sultan Sahak: <i>Founder of the Ahl-i-Haqq</i>	214
19 The Ahl-i Haqq: <i>The Cult of Dawud</i>	224
20 The Ahl-i Haqq: <i>The Jam</i>	231
21 The Ahl-i Haqq: <i>The Role of Ali</i>	245
22 The Nusayris (Alawis): <i>Ancient Period</i>	255
23 The Nusayris: <i>Middle Period</i>	267

24	The Nusayris: <i>Under the French Mandate</i>	280
25	The Nusayris: <i>Rise to Political Power</i>	292
26	The Nusayri Religious System: <i>The Concept of God</i>	311
27	The Nusayri Religious System: <i>The Apotheosis of Ali</i>	324
28	The Nusayri Concept of Light: <i>Shamsis and Qamaris</i>	337
29	The Nusayri "Trinity": <i>Ali, Muhammad and Salman al-Farisi</i>	342
30	The Nusayri Religious System: <i>The Twelve Imams</i>	352
31	The Nusayri Religious System: <i>Role of the Aytam and Spiritual Hierarchies</i>	357
32	The Nusayri Religious System: <i>Metempsychosis</i>	362
33	The Nusayri Religious System: <i>Initiation</i>	372
34	Nusayri Ceremonies: <i>Festivals</i>	382
35	The Nusayri Mass	398
36	The Nusayris, Sunnites, and Twelver Shiites	409
37	Pagan, Christian, and Islamic Elements in the Beliefs of the Ghulat	419
38	Armenian Elements in the Beliefs of the Kizilbash Kurds	432
	Notes	449
	Bibliography	535
	Index	565

Armenian Elements in the Beliefs of the Kizilbash Kurds

THROUGHOUT THIS STUDY, we have identified the Kizilbash as Turkoman and Kurdish tribes who held extreme Shiite beliefs and became adherents of the Safawi Sufi Order of Persia. They share common religious beliefs and practices with the Bektashis. In many parts of Asia Minor, the Kizilbash and the Bektashis are considered one and the same.¹ The Kizilbash are divided into several subgroups living in many parts of Turkey. These subgroups are known by different names—including the Takhtajis (woodcutters) and Çepnis—although generally they share the common name of Kizilbash, indicating their association with the Safawis of Iran.² In some parts of Turkey they call themselves Alawis (Alevis—worshippers of Ali) and are usually connected with the Bektashi order of dervishes.³ The Kizilbash Kurds live in Dersim (Tunceli), an area of about seven thousand square miles in the upper Euphrates valley, lying mostly between the Furat Su and the Murad Su, two tributaries of the Euphrates.⁴ Until World War I the whole area was populated by multi-ethnic groups, Kurds and Armenians comprising the majority, but as a result of the massacre of Armenians and their deportation by the government of the Young Turks in 1915, the Armenian population of Dersim, indeed of all of eastern Turkey, was extremely diminished. The Kizilbash Kurds spread farther east to western Iran, around Kermanshah, Kerind, Sahna, and Kengavar, where they are called Ahl-i Haqq (Ali Ilahis), that is, deifiers of Ali.⁵ A racial and religious affinity between Kurds and Armenians have been noted by those who have come in contact with these peoples. Like the Armenians, the Kurds are of Indo-European origin, and are akin to the Armenians. The Mamakanli Kurds are said to be descendants of the Armenian Mamigonians.⁶ Kurds in the Haimanah

district southwest of Angora (Ankara), and around Sivas are divided into Sunnites and Shiites. The latter are known as Kizilbash. One of the Kurdish tribes in the province of Sivas is possibly of Armenian origin. The Kizilbash Kurds retain certain Christian practices and sometimes call themselves Christians.⁷ There is evidence that some of the Kizilbash Kurds of Dersim came originally from Armenia. These Kizilbash are of two groups. The Sayyid Hasanalis, who inhabit the plains and are said to have come originally from Khurasan in Persia, lived in the vicinity of Malatya (Melitene) and then immigrated to Dersim. The second group, the true Dersimlis who inhabit the mountainous area of the Muzur Dagħ and Kuzichan, are believed to be descended from the pagan Armenians who lived in Dersim before the Christian era. These true Dersimlis speak a Kurdish dialect (Zaza), interspersed with Armenian words, not used by other Kurds living in the same region.⁸ This is confirmed by E. B. Soane, who states that the Balaki tribesmen of Dersim, who live among Kurds and Zaza, speak a language that is a mixture of Kurdish, Armenian, and Arabic.⁹ There is some truth in this assumption, which is supported by the ancient Armenian chronicler Moses Khorenantsi (Khoren). From Khorenantsi's chronicle, we learn that Dersim constituted a part of Armenia. He relates that after Xisuthra and his sons sailed to Armenia and went ashore there, one of his sons, Sim, went northwest to explore the land. Sim arrived at a plain penetrated by a river which flowed down to Assyria (present-day Iraq). He lingered at the bank of the river for two moons and gave his name to the mountain.¹⁰ The river is the Euphrates, which flows through the district of Dersim to Iraq. We may assume that Dersim is named after Xisuthra's son Sim: *Der* in Armenian means "lord and master," and Dersim indicates that this area belonged to Lord Sim.

Some of these Kizilbash may have been Armenians converted to Shiism. Taylor is of the opinion that the Dersimlis were Christian Armenians converted to Shiite Islam. They influenced the Hasanalis with Christian customs, which the Dersimlis retained after their conversion. He observes that some characteristics of the Dersimlis resemble those of the Armenians, especially among the inmates of convents around Lake Van and parts of Kurdistan.¹¹ Ellsworth Huntington also maintains that the inhabitants of the Harput mountains were Christian Armenians who, because of persecution by the Persians who occupied their homeland, became nominal Muslims and intermarried with the invaders.¹² Among these Armenian converts are the Kizilbash. According to the thirteenth-century traveler Yaqut al-Hamawi (d. 1229), the inhabitants of Erzinjan in the upper Euphrates valley were Armenians, and there were some

Muslims among them.¹³ Another traveler, Ibn Battuta, who visited this city in the following century (1330), states that most of the inhabitants are Armenian Muslims, but that the Turks among them speak Turkish.¹⁴ There is some evidence that the Sunnite Afshars of the Anti-Taurus are of Armenian descent,¹⁵ but this is only an isolated case of the conversion of Armenians to Sunnite Islam.

A great number of Armenians were converted to extremist Shiite Islam and joined the Kizilbash while retaining many christian practices. It is important to note that only the Armenians in Asia Minor, and not the Greeks, converted to the extreme Shiism of the Kizilbash.¹⁶ Some Armenians believe that the Kizilbash in the mountains of Dersim were Armenians who fled to these mountains for refuge from the Assyrians, and that the present Kurds are their descendants. This assumption probably motivated Armenian bishops and priests in the nineteenth century to try to lead these Kurdish descendants of Armenians back to Christianity.¹⁷ Regardless of this assumption, the fact remains that since time immemorial Anatolia has been populated by the Armenian people. Religious traditions and the observations of modern writers reveal the connection between the Kizilbash and Armenians. The writers already quoted are unanimous in their belief that the Kizilbash of Anatolia were Christians who for some reason, most likely persecution, embraced Islam but secretly retained many Christian practices.¹⁸ This is confirmed by the claim of the Kizilbash and other extremist Shiites themselves, related by White, that "less than the thickness of an onion skin separates them from the Christians."¹⁹ There is evidence that two or three centuries ago the Armenians of Hamshen, east of Trebizond between Rize and Batum (the ancient Armenian province of Daik), were so brutally massacred by Muslims that many of the survivors converted to Islam. Although they have become Turkified, their Turkish dialect contains unmistakable traces of their Armenian origin.²⁰ It is also reported that in the year 1751, thousands of Armenian families in Turkey, especially in the province of Oudi, were forced to embrace Islam because of the persecution inflicted upon them by a certain fanatic Çelebi and his collaborators, the Persian Muslims. To this day, many people in that province have names betraying Armenian origin. The Armenian villagers of Luristan have also converted to Islam because of persecution, and traces of Christianity can be seen among them, as among the villagers of the Oudi province. The Turkish women of Gis, for example, invoke the name of St. Eliseus (probably Elijah), whose sanctuary is venerated by both Muslim Turks and Armenians in that city. Also, when a Muslim Turkish mother in Gis

puts her child to bed, she makes the sign of the cross over the child while uttering the name of Jesus.²¹

Another interesting theory regarding the existence of elements of Armenian Christianity in the beliefs of the Ahl-i Haqq (Ali Ilahis) is advanced by W. Ivanow, who in 1953 published an English translation and analysis of a religious document of the Ahl-i Haqq. We have partly discussed Ivanow's theory in connection with Sultan Sahak, a prominent figure in the religious traditions of the Kakaiyya and the Ahl-i Haqq. Ivanow showed that Sahak is an Armenian name, used exclusively for Isaac. If the Ahl-i Haqq (and, for that matter, the Kakaiyya) wanted to write this name in the correct Arabic manner, they should have written it as Ishaq, and not Sahak. One must conclude, then, that the term Sahak demonstrates an unmistakable Armenian influence.²² Although Ivanow is discussing the Ahl-i Haqq, his theory of Armenian influence applies equally to the Kizilbash Kurds of Dersim and to neighboring sects in adjacent Iraq, such as the Shabak, because of the striking similarities of their beliefs.

Ivanow argues that Armenian Christianity has exerted a significant influence on the beliefs of the Ahl-i Haqq and other extremist Shiite sects. A careful study of the doctrines and religious practices of these sects shows that they derive, not from orthodox but from heterodox Armenian Christianity—in this case, from the Paulicians. But who are these Armenian Paulicians, and what is their association with the Muslims, and particularly with heterodox Shiite sects?

The Paulician heresy dates back to the third century, when Armenian votaries established a strong foothold in Armenia and came to be known as Paulicians. The origin of the term Paulician is somewhat obscure. Some writers associate it with St. Paul;²³ others maintain that it derives from a certain Paul, an Armenian son of a Manichean woman named Callinice from Samosata, who sent Paul and her other son John to Armenia to propagate the Manichean heresy. The Manichean heresy takes its name from Mani, who lived in Persia in the third century and preached a combination of Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and other religious beliefs. Still others hold that the term Paulician derives from another Paul, who lived in Armenia during the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian II Rhinotmetus (reigned 669–711).²⁴ According to the Armenian writer Karapet Ter Mekerttschian, when the name Paulician is used in Armenian as a diminutive form, it means "followers of little Paul," but Mekerttschian offers no explanation as to who this little Paul is.²⁵

From the latter part of the third century, the Paulicians were considered exponents of the Manichean heresy, which was condemned by the Council of Nicea (325). They considered themselves "true Christians," however, and called other Christians "Romanists." They denied any association with Manicheism or with Paul and John, the sons of Callinice.²⁶ In fact, Armenian heretics seldom associate the Paulicians with Manichaeism, or attribute to them Manichean teaching. The Armenian writer Gregory Magistros (d. 1058) was the first to relate that the Paulicians received their name and teaching from Paul of Samosata, a patriarch of Antioch condemned for heresy in 269. Magistros states, "Here then you see the Paulicians, who got their poison from Paul of Samosata."²⁷ The heresy of Paul of Samosata was essentially that of the Adoptionists, who maintained that Jesus Christ received divinity at His baptism, and that the Virgin Mary gave birth not to God, but to Christ the man. In other words, Christ was not the Word made flesh through whom the whole creation came into existence, but was a creature who became the Head of all creation. He became an adopted Son when the Spirit of God rested upon him at baptism.

After their condemnation by the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), the Paulicians seem to have faded from the empire, but they reemerged in Armenia in the seventh century. In the time of the Armenian Catholicos Nersis III, "the Builder" (641–661), they established their headquarters in Jrga, north of the city of Bitlis.²⁸ They also spread into Syria, where their leader, Theodore Rushduni, died at Damascus in 654.²⁹ In the next century (about 717), they made Miyafarqin (present-day Diyarbakr in Turkey) their headquarters and attracted the attention of the Umayyad governor al-Walid.³⁰ According to John the Philosopher, who became the Armenian Catholicos in 719, the Paulicians were dissenters [heretics] who, because of oppression by the Orthodox Armenian Church, had sought the protection of the Arabs—who had challenged the hegemony of the Byzantines in Armenia since 650.³¹ This explains the interest of the Umayyads in these Paulicians and the collaboration between the two peoples. We should not assume, however, that these Armenian Paulicians betrayed the Christian Church and allied themselves with the Arabs. It was the cruel treatment of both church and state that forced the Paulicians to seek the protection of the Muslims. The Byzantines' persecution of the Paulicians may have destroyed a strong bulwark that might otherwise have thwarted the advance of the Muslim Arabs into Armenia.³²

Like the Byzantine Church, the Byzantine emperors were determined to eradicate the Paulicians. Throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, they hunted the Paulicians down. Under Constantine

Pogonatus (reigned 668–85) one Paulician leader was put to death, while under Justinian Rhinotmetus another leader was burned alive.³³ Another emperor, Leo III Isaurian, called the Syrian (reigned 717–41), tried to decimate the Paulicians but failed. It was not until the time of Nicephorus Logotheta (802–811) that the harried Paulicians found respite from persecution.³⁴

The persecution was renewed, however, under Emperors Michael I (reigned 811–13) and Leo V, the Armenian (813–20). Leo ordered the bishop and civil governor of Neo-Caesarea (present day Niksar, north of Tokat, Turkey) to investigate the state of the Paulicians in eastern Asia Minor. The Paulicians killed the emperor's commissioners and fled to Melitene, where they enjoyed the protection of the Muslim governor, who treated them kindly and settled them in the small town of Argaeum. From Melitene the Paulicians began to raid Byzantine territory.³⁵ But as the Byzantine hostility abated, the Paulicians returned to their homes in Byzantine territory, only to suffer the severest persecution they had yet faced at the hands of Empress Theodora (841–55). Theodora ordered that the Paulicians be restored to the Byzantine Church or exterminated by any means. Commissioners were sent to Armenia to carry out her orders, which they did with such zeal that about ten thousand Paulicians were killed, and their property confiscated. Those who escaped the wanton butchery sought refuge with the Muslims, who gave them full protection. This time the Paulicians built for themselves the city of Tephrike. They allied themselves with the Muslims and continued to fight the Byzantines throughout the ninth century. Their attacks against the Byzantines culminated in an attack by Karbeas, an Armenian army officer whose father had died because of the persecution; leading an army of Paulicians, he captured several cities, including Tephrike, which had fallen into Byzantine hands. He was supported by his father-in-law Chrysochir, a convert to Islam. One of the captured cities was Ephesus, whose Church of St. John was turned into a stable. Emperor Basil I, the Macedonian (867–86), desiring to reestablish peace with the Paulicians, in 870 delegated Peter Siculus [the Sicilian] to approach the Paulicians of Tephrike to negotiate peace and exchange of prisoners of war. Peter's mission failed, mainly because of the extravagant demands of Chrysochir, and the persecution and war were resumed.³⁶ Basil fought against the Paulicians, with the result that Chrysochir was slain in battle, Karbeas was reconciled, and Tephrike was recaptured (873); the power of the Paulicians seemed to have been completely destroyed.

According to Armenian sources, the Paulicians came to be known

as Tondraketsi (Tondrakites), after the town of Tonrak in the district of Manzikert, where they set up their headquarters. Both Gregory of Nareg (late tenth century) and Gregory Magistros (d. 1058) state that the leader of the Tondrakites was a certain Smbat Spartapet, but offer no significant information about him except that he rejected the doctrines of the Orthodox Armenian Church.³⁷ Magistros simply calls him Smbat and says that he appeared in the time of the Lord John, the overseer of Armenia, and of Smbat Bagratuni. He came from the village of Zarehaven, in the district of Tsalkotn, and lived in Tonrak.³⁸ Conybeare identifies Smbat as the same Smbat Bagratum [Bagratuni] who founded a petty Armenian dynasty in Bagratum in the upper Euphrates valley of Murad-Chai. This dynasty extended from southeast of the Euphrates valley to the east of the city of Harput, in present-day Turkey.³⁹ To his enemies the Orthodox Armenians, Smbat was a heretic and Antichrist, but he considered himself "light, life, and truth."⁴⁰ He interfered in the internal affairs of the Orthodox Armenian Church, installing and deposing their Catholicoi. In 849, the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil (d. 861) dispatched Yusuf Ibn Muhammad al-Marwazi, who lived in the Armenian marches, to conquer the Armenian Prince Ashot, who ruled the province of Vaspurakan southeast of Van, and Prince Bagart, who ruled Taron.⁴¹ When al-Marwazi reached Khilat (Akhlāt), he encountered and routed Ashot and then invited Smbat to have an audience with him. It was a trick; when Smbat appeared before al-Marwazi, he was treacherously captured and sent to Samarra in Iraq.⁴² (According to al-Baladhuri [d. 892], it was Buqrāt Ibn Ashot [the Bagratid Ashot] whom al-Marwazi captured and sent to Samarra.)⁴³ Seeing the treachery of the Muslim commander, Smbat's followers, the Tondrakites, rallied their forces to avenge the capture of their leader. In 852, they stormed the city of Muş and killed al-Marwazi, who had sought refuge on the roof of the great church built by Smbat in Muş. Some Armenian chronicles state that after his capture, Smbat converted to Islam, and that other Armenians, especially the Artsruni princes, followed his example. However, according to the Armenian chronicler Vardan (d. 1270), Smbat Sparapet was captured by the Abbasid Amir (prince) Bouha (Bugha, the Turkish commander) and taken to Baghdad in 855. Bugha promised to restore to him the Kingdom of Armenia if he recanted his Christian faith, but Smbat always answered that he could not leave Christ or forsake the Christian faith, which he had received by the grace of baptism. Because of his refusal to recant, Smbat was tortured and slain. His followers asked the Caliph al-Mutawakkil to give them his body, which he did. They carried the body to the vicinity of ancient Babylon and laid it in a shrine built on the site of the lion's den into which the prophet Daniel was cast.⁴⁴

The death of Smbat in 855 by no means put an end to the Tondrakites. They were as strong as ever in the middle of the eleventh century, when Magistros recorded the names of their leaders up to his time.⁴⁵ They occupied the country south of Erzerum to Muş, and were predominant in the entire upper valley of the Tigris and Euphrates.⁴⁶ It is significant that this region included the district of Dersim (Tunceli), where the Kurdish extremist Shiites also lived.

Considered heretics, the Paulicians (by the eleventh century called Tondrakites) were persecuted by both church and state and became friends with the Muslims, who offered them protection. Gregory Magistros credits himself with the persecution of the Tondrakites. In 1050, Magistros, who was offered the title of Duke of Vaspurakan and Taron by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine IX Monomachus (reigned 1042–54), was dispatched to the southeast region of Armenia to investigate the state of affairs, especially that of the Tondrakites. Magistros heaps invective on the Tondrakites and relates that when he reached Mesopotamia, he rid the land of the tares sown by them. He also says he forced many of those who lived in Tonrak to recant their heresy and return to orthodoxy. He claims that he did not inflict bodily harm on the Tondrakites.⁴⁷ However, the Tondrakites suffered the severest persecution at the hands of the catholicoi of the Orthodox Armenian Church, whose favorite form of torture was to brand their foreheads with the image of a fox.⁴⁸ It is surprising that while the Paulicians were being persecuted in Armenia and Mesopotamia, their heresy spread to Europe and was kept alive by heretical groups like the Bogomiles of Bulgaria, the Patrini, the Cathars, the Albigenses, and the Waldensians—reaching as far as Oxford in 1160.⁴⁹

Despite persecution, a remnant of the Tondrakites survived until modern times. Writing in the nineteenth century, the Armenian Orthodox Paul W. Meherean states that a small group of the Tondrakites survived between Erzerum and Muş.⁵⁰ He tells of a certain Hovannes, who came from the Monastery of Bordshimasur and falsely styled himself a bishop. Hovannes was a Paulician (Tondrakite) who between 1774 and 1781 spread his heresy in Constantinople. He visited Venice and then returned to Erzerum and Muş to propagate his heretical teachings. He escaped the persecution of the Orthodox Armenian Church only by converting to Islam. He is the one who in 1782 made a copy of *The Key of Truth*, a manual of the Paulician-Tondrakite heresy. In his excellent introduction to this book, Conybeare vividly relates the story of the late survivors of the Tondrakites, numbering only twenty-five families. They were refugees from the village of Jewiurm, in the district of Khnus, who settled in the village of Arkhweli, in the province of Shirak. Conybeare

also describes the investigation of their belief by the Orthodox Armenian Church; they confessed that they were Paulicians and that *The Key of Truth* was their authoritative book, and some of them renounced the Paulician heresy and returned to orthodoxy.⁵¹

We may conclude that the Paulicians, who were persecuted by both church and state as heretics, always found refuge in Muslim territories and allied themselves with the Muslims. This Paulician-Muslim alliance facilitated the Arab invasion of Byzantine territory. Armenia became a hotbed of revolt against the Byzantines, while from the ninth century onward the Paulicians and the Muslims were close friends.⁵²

Of great significance to our discussion is the fact that these Paulicians (Tondrakites) lived together with the Kurds and also with the Turkomans, who rushed en masse into the Byzantine country, especially after the defeat of the Byzantine army by the Seljuks at Malazgirt in 1071. It is also likely that many Paulicians embraced Islam to escape persecution by church and state. One such convert was the Paulician leader Chrysochir.

The social intercourse between the Paulicians and the Muslims may explain the fact that the Turkoman and Kurdish Shiite Kizilbash adopted from these Paulicians some Christian beliefs and practices. Otherwise, how can we explain the fact that until the nineteenth century a tribe of Kurds who lived in the district of Bayezid near Tonrak, the headquarters of the Tondrakites, were called Manicheans?⁵³ Why these Kurds, the neighbors of the heretical Tondrakites, are called Manicheans i.e., followers of Mani (216–76) is unknown. Mani's doctrine was a synthesis of Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Christianity, and Mani claimed himself to be the Paraclete (comforter, or holy spirit) promised by Jesus. The question becomes all the more important when we realize that the Armenian Paulicians were accused of being Manichean heretics, an accusation that set both church and state against them.

Throughout the whole history of the Muslim people, we find no Muslim religious sect or group accused of being Manichean or even called by this name. Since these Kurds who were called Manicheans lived in the vicinity of Tonrak, headquarters of the Paulicians or Tondrakites, the possibility becomes greater that they were once Paulicians who converted to Islam to escape persecution by both church and state. It is probable that these Tondrakites converted to Islam in its Shiite form, already the faith of a number of Turkomans, in order to preserve their traditional tenets and practices and to avoid the rigid form of Sunnite Islam, commonly hostile to Christian beliefs.

As heretics, the Tondrakites renounced most of the tenets and

rituals of the traditional Christian church as non-Biblical. They rejected the virgin birth of Christ, maintaining that Mary gave birth to a mere man who at His baptism became the Messiah, the Son by adoption. They objected to the worship of the cross and even to the signing of the cross, and denied the intercession of Saints and the efficacy of the Eucharist (Holy Communion). There are, however, striking similarities between some of the practices of the Paulicians-Tondrakites and those of extremist Shiites. Like the Ghulat, the Tondrakites had no churches, believing that the real church was not a structure of wood or stone but the invisible communion of the faithful. They conducted their rituals, especially the celebration of the Eucharist, in private homes, cellars, stables, or wherever else they could. This, to be sure, may have been an ancient Armenian practice retained by these heretics. In his canons of the church (c. 425), the Armenian Catholicos Sahak states that out of ignorance, Armenian elders celebrated the Agape and Eucharist in their homes. He insists that these rituals should be celebrated in the church.⁵⁴

Because they rejected the great mystery of the sacrifice of Christ and refused to honor the Cross, the Tondrakites interpreted their sacrament "less as a sacrifice offered for the sins of men than as a meal symbolic of the unity of the faithful."⁵⁵ This unity was symbolized by the use of only one loaf of unleavened bread, laid on a wooden table. This recalls the type of communion performed by all extremist Shiite groups which, in the case of the Kizilbash, G. E. White says, "is a debased form of the Lord's Supper."⁵⁶ It may be that this concept of the Eucharist and the abhorrence of altars of stone led them to eat in an ordinary room off an ordinary table of wood.⁵⁷ The Eucharist was always preceded by the Agape, which may have been a continuance of the Jewish Paschal meal (in which meat was consumed, preferably the flesh of pigeons and sheep) in the earliest Armenian Church.⁵⁸ According to Frédéric Macler, this kind of sacrifice, called Matal or Matagh, is still practiced by Armenians, with such offerings as a cock, a sheep, or fruits.⁵⁹ In the communal meal of the Shabak and Ahl-i Haqq, a cock or a sheep is sacrificed.⁶⁰ It is interesting that these practices survived until the beginning of the nineteenth century in the village of Arkhweli in the province of Shirak, in the present state of Soviet Armenia. The village's population included twenty-five families who were Paulician-Tondrakites. The Armenian Orthodox priest of the village, who discovered these heretics, wrote to the consistory of Yerevan on 23 May 1841, describing their "wicked practices." One of these practices was the communion, in which every member of the congregation received a piece of bread and drank a sip of wine.⁶¹

There are also similarities between the religious hierarchy of the Paulicians and that of the extremist Shiites. The Paulician-Tondrakites had no church organization and no priests, but did have elders, called the "elect ones," who had the power to bind and loose men from their obligations. They held no particular office and were not charged with any special function in the church, but were believed to be those in whom the spirit of God dwelt and thus to be of the same nature as Christ Himself, the only difference between them and Christ being a matter of degree.⁶² This recalls the spiritual powers of the religious leaders of the extremist Shiites, who are no more than "elders" but are held in utmost honor, and, in the case of the *Ahl-i Haqq*, are worshipped as God.⁶³ These leaders are called the manifestation of the Truth and considered the only ones in the community with the right to bind and loose men from their obligations. They not only hear confession of the sins of the laity, but also offer them absolution.⁶⁴

A number of traditions may serve to demonstrate that the Kizilbash Kurds are akin to the Armenians. One of these is a Kizilbash legend which represents the fifth Imam, Muhammad al-Baqir, as being born of the virgin daughter of an Armenian priest. This legend, preserved for us by Capt. Molyneux-Seel, is maintained by the Kizilbash Kurds of Der-sim (Tunceli), who believe that the Imam al-Baqir is the founder of their sect.

When al-Husayn, son of Ali, was killed at Karbala, Iraq (October 680), his murderers cut off his head and took it to the Umayyad Caliph Yazid Ibn Muawiya in Damascus. En route to Damascus, they stopped to rest at the house of an Armenian priest named Akh (Brother) Murtaza Keshish. The priest noticed that al-Husayn's head showed supernatural signs and wanted to keep it. He tried to devise a way to retain this precious relic, but failed to do so. While he was deep in thought, his oldest son entered and asked why he was so pensive. The priest told his son about his desire to keep the head of al-Husayn. The son offered a solution, asking his father to cut off his head and give it to the "Turks" (meaning the Sunnite Muslims who killed al-Husayn) instead of al-Husayn's head. Without hesitation the priest cut off his son's head and offered it to the "Turks," but they refused to take it, insisting on taking the head of al-Husayn. The priest happened to have seven sons, six of whose heads he cut off successively to satisfy the murderers of al-Husayn, but these endeavors failed. While deeply distressed over what to do next, he heard a voice saying to him, "Smear the head of your last son with the blood of the head of al-Husayn." This he did, and when he offered the head of his last son to the murderers, they accepted it without

hesitation, believing that they had carried off the head of al-Husayn. Thus the head of al-Husayn was kept by the Armenian priest. When he was in possession of this precious treasure, the priest placed the head in a special compartment and adorned it with gold, silver and silk.

This priest had a single daughter. One day she entered the compartment where al-Husayn's head had been placed, and to her astonishment she found a golden bowl filled with honey; apparently the head of al-Husayn had been transformed. She took a taste of the honey and immediately became pregnant. Her father, noticing her pregnancy, determined to kill her. But she was able to convince him that she had miraculously become pregnant when she tasted the honey into which the head of al-Husayn had been transformed. The father believed her and was appeased.

One day the maiden complained of a cold, and when she sneezed, her father noticed a bright flame coming out of her nose. The blame was immediately transformed into a child, who was the Imam al-Baqir. When the "Turks" learned that a descendent of Ali had been born, they sent men to find and kill the child. When they came to the priest's house, the child's mother was busy washing the household linen. Suspecting the men intended to kill al-Baqir, she hid him in a copper cauldron which was on the fire and covered him with linen. Now these men were magicians and knew through their magic that the child was hidden in a copper cauldron, but they could not find the house in which he was hidden. Totally baffled, they left, and thus the life of the child was saved. Because of this incident, the child was called Bakir, which in Turkish means "copper."⁶⁵ It is true that in the Turkish language *bakir* means "copper," but this meaning does not apply to the fifth Imam, Muhammad Ibn Ali; he was nicknamed al-Baqir because of his profound knowledge of religious sciences. However, the fact remains that the originator of this story, whoever he was, wished to establish a strong relationship between the Kizilbash Kurds and the Armenians by designating a young Armenian virgin, the daughter of a priest, as the mother of the Imam al-Baqir.

According to a slightly different version of this story related by G. E. White, when Ali was murdered by his enemies, his head was cut off and by some chance was entrusted to a Christian priest for safekeeping. Afterwards the murderers wanted to abuse the head of Ali, but the priest refused to deliver it up to them. The priest offered the heads of his seven sons instead of Ali, but they were refused. Finally his wife asked him to cut off her head; he did so, and it was accepted by the persecutors. The authenticity of this story is not important; what is important is the respect the extremist Shiites have for Christianity, to the point of trusting

the head of Ali or his son al-Husayn to a Christian priest, as related in both versions of the story. As White rightly remarks, the story is exceedingly suggestive in showing the Alevi (Kizilbash) belief that when their hero suffered death and abuse by his persecutors, a passionate Christian priest did not hesitate to sacrifice his own sons and wife in order to save the suffering hero from indignity.⁶⁶

The story also vividly recalls another tale, relating the miraculous birth of Balim Sultan, the second founder of the Bektashi order. Like al-Baqir in the legend just mentioned, Balim Sultan was born of a virgin Christian princess, who conceived him after eating bal (Turkish for honey). It is not sheer coincidence that both the Bektashis and Kizilbash should attribute miraculous birth to their patrons, and that in both cases these patrons were born of Christian virgins.⁶⁷ Regardless of their truth or lack of it, both legends are suggestive of the strong Christian (and in the case of the Kizilbash story, Armenian) influence on the beliefs of the extremist Shiite sects. They also indicate the deep hatred the extremist Shiites harbor for the Sunnites, a hatred which the Umayyads inspired by their killing of al-Husayn.

Several stories connected with the carrying off of al-Husayn's head to Damascus and with the compassion Christian priests and monks had for al-Husayn have become a part of Shiite folklore. According to one of these stories, after leaving the town of Baalbak in Syria, the murderers of al-Husayn rested for the night near the cell of a Christian monk. At night, the monk looked through the window and saw a pillar of light reaching up to heaven, issuing forth from al-Husayn's head. He also saw a door open in heaven and hosts of angels descend upon al-Husayn's head. On the next day, the monk appealed to the carriers of al-Husayn's head to let him keep it at least for one hour, but they would not do so unless he paid them a certain sum of money. The monk gave them money and the leader of the company handed him the head, fixed on a lance. Holding the head in his hands, the monk kissed it and broke into tears. Addressing the head, he implored al-Husayn to tell his grandfather, the prophet Muhammad, when he met him in heaven, that he [the monk] bears testimony that there is no God but Allah, that Muhammad is His apostle, and that Ali is His Wali (vicar). Then the monk returned the head of al-Husayn to the murderers. When they proceeded to divide the money which the monk paid them, they found to their bewilderment that the pieces of coin had turned into pieces of clay, with an inscription stating "the wrongdoers still know what fate awaits them."⁶⁸ There is also a tradition still current among the Shiites of Iraq that an Englishman rushed to save al-Husayn from his enemies and offered him water when

his murderers tried to drive him and his company to death by thirst, by preventing them from reaching the waters of the Euphrates River. This is most likely British propaganda meant to win the sympathy of the Shiite tribes in southern Iraq who were opposed to the British occupation of Iraq.

Another tradition connecting the Kizilbash with the Armenians is that of the legendary figure al-Khadir (known by common people as Khidr). Although the Quran does not mention al-Khadir by name, Islamic traditions associate him with Moses (Quran, Sura 18). Once, when Moses was preaching with great eloquence to the Israelites, he was asked whether another man wiser than he existed. He answered in the negative. God appeared to Moses in a vision and rebuked him for saying that no other man was wiser than he. He told Moses that His servant the Khadir was surely wiser than he, and that he would find him at the confluence of the two seas. Taking with him his lieutenant Joshua, son of Nun, Moses proceeded on a long journey until he came to the place described by God, and there he saw the Khadir. The story then goes on to tell of the feats the Khadir performed, which proved to Moses that the Khadir was wiser than he. The Khadir had been permitted to drink from the fountain of life, and thus had become immortal; hence he was named Khadir (ever-verdant).⁶⁹ Usually the Khadir is associated with Phineas, Elijah, Alexander the Great, and St. George. He is considered a saint by both Muslims and Christians, and many mosques and religious sites in Jerusalem, Nablus, Damascus, Baghdad, and Mosul are associated with his name.⁷⁰ Armenian tradition associates him with St. Sarkis (Sergius).⁷¹ The Kizilbash of Turkey call him Khidr Elias and make pilgrimages to Armenian churches whose patron is St. Sarkis.⁷² They also celebrate a feast in his name on 9 February, preceded by one week of fasting.⁷³ The Khadir also had a prominent place among other extremist Shiites, like the Bektashis and the Nusayris of Syria.⁷⁴ The tradition of the Khadir serves as an important link between the extremist Shiites (especially the Kizilbash Kurds) and Christianity.

The link between the Kizilbash and the Armenians is strengthened by the honor and respect the Kizilbash show for Armenian churches and relics. At the Armenian church in Muş an old parchment copy of the New Testament was discovered written in Armenian. The Armenian countrymen and the Kizilbash Kurds believed in its miraculous healing power.⁷⁵ The Armenian monastery Surp Garabet Vank (St. John the Baptist Monastery), situated to the north of Hozat, seat of the government in Dersim (Tunceli), is greatly honored by the Kizilbash Kurds. It is believed by the people in that region that when the Kurds once tried to

destroy the monastery, they were repelled by the miraculous relics of St. John the Baptist. Realizing the divine power of the saint, the Kurds began making pilgrimages to the monastery to seek healing from sickness.⁷⁶ It is also reported that the Kizilbash attend Christian church services and kneel and bow with the rest of the worshipers. Showing an even closer association with the Armenians, the Kizilbash do not decline to bury their dead next to those of Armenians, a practice most offensive to Sunnite Muslims. Ellsworth Huntington reports that behind the village of Kala in Dersim, on a steep slope of the Mushar Mountain, there are several shrines. One of these is said to house the grave of an Armenian girl who took care of the great church at the top of the mountain. The Kizilbash aghas (chiefs) were honored by being buried in the same graveyard, next to this Armenian girl.⁷⁷

The socioreligious relationship between the Kizilbash and the Armenians seems to be an established fact. Armenians and Kurds, who are ethnically and perhaps anthropologically homogeneous, have been living side by side in Anatolia since time immemorial.⁷⁸ In fact, the Kizilbash population has been dense in the Armenian provinces of eastern Turkey, with many villages inhabited by both Armenians and Kizilbash Kurds.⁷⁹ Sometimes this coexistence was disrupted by flareups of violence, or by the common social conflict instigated by idiosyncratic social customs. The ancient Armenian church of St. Nerses at Rumkale, on the upper Euphrates River, was forcibly occupied by Muslims in the latter part of the seventeenth century.⁸⁰ Likewise, at the village of Hozat in Dersim, the original Armenian inhabitants have been driven out by Kizilbash Kurds. The graveyard of the village's church is full of tombstones bearing the elaborate flowery cross commonly used for Armenian clergy.⁸¹ In some cases the Kurds stay close to Armenian villages, where they abduct and marry Armenian women.⁸²

In conclusion, it seems fairly clear that the religion of the Kizilbash, who live mostly in eastern Turkey but are also scattered from Erzerum in the east to Aydin and Smyrna (Izmir) in the west, belongs to the Shiite sect of Islam, although their beliefs and rituals contain considerable pagan and Christian elements, placing them outside the pale of orthodox Islam. Some of the Kizilbash are Kurds, and they are mostly found in Dersim in the upper Euphrates valley. This area was at one time heavily populated by Armenians, as is evident from the many ruins of Armenian villages and churches. The religious beliefs and practices of the Kizilbash are shared by several other Shiite groups known by different names: the Nusayris in Syria; the Shabak, Bajwan, Sarliyya-Kakaiyya, and Ibrahimiyya in Iraq; and the Ahl-i Haqq (Ali Ilahis) in western Iran.

Sometimes the Shabak are identified with the Kizilbash and are in fact called by this name. Some of these sects, whose communicants live in the area stretching from Anatolia to Syria, Iraq, and Iran, not only possess religious beliefs with only slight variations, but have anthropological similarities revealing a common ethnic origin. This area forms a melting pot for several ethnic groups, especially for the Persians, Kurds, and Armenians.⁸³ This area became a border between Turkey and Persia and has witnessed the activities of Shiite propagandists since the thirteenth century. Shiite propaganda was carried by the nomadic Turkoman and Kurdish tribes to Armenian Christians, with the result that a heterodox religion emerged whose veneer is Shiite Islam, but whose core is a syncretism of paganism, Mithraism, Armenian Christianity, and perhaps Mazdaism.⁸⁴ By their own admission, members of these heterodox Shiite sects claim a strong association with Christianity, predominantly Armenian Christianity. They were most probably converted to extreme Shiism, either through conviction or compulsion, but retained most of their Christian practices and beliefs. A good example of such a conversion from Armenian Christianity to Kizilbashism is found among the inhabitants of the villages in the district of Rizeh, in the province of Trebizond, who, although they profess Islam, have preserved the rite of baptism and speak Armenian rather than Turkish.⁸⁵ The majority of the Ghulat sects studied here fall into the same category as the extremist Shiites of Turkey. They form a vital part of the population in the area between Anatolia and Persia, which they have traversed for centuries.⁸⁶

People, 274; Babinger, "Schejch Bedr ed-Din," 1-106; and Köprülü, *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutesavvıflar* (Istanbul: Matbaa-Yi Amire, 1918), 234.

61. Cuinet, *La Turquie de Asie*, 1:341; and F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 1:83-84 and 2:571-72.

62. White, "The Shia Turks," 235.

63. Crowfoot, "Survival Among the Kappadokian Kizilbash," 305-15.

38—Armenian Elements in the Beliefs of the Kizilbash Kurds

1. Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, 1:855; F. Von Luschan and E. Peterson, *Reisen in Lykien* (Wien: Gerold, 1899), 2:198-213; and Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 1:142.

2. Molyneux-Seel, "Journey in Derism," 66; White, "Alevi Turks," 690 ff; F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 142-43; and Faruk Sumer, "Cepni," *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden and London: E. J. Brill, 1965), 2:0.

3. Dunmore, report dated 22 January 1857, 219-20; Ball, report dated 8 August 1857, 395-96; Nutting, report dated 30 July 1860, 345-46; Herrick, report dated 16 November 1865, 68-69; Livingston, report dated 30 March 1869, 59-246; Jewett, report dated 16 December 1857, 109; Winchester, report dated 28 November 1860, 71; Southgate, *Narrative of a Tour*, 1:170-71; and White, "The Shia Turks," 225-36. For the beliefs of Kizilbash who live between Sivas and Erzerum, see J. G. Taylor, "Journal of a Tour," 304.

4. Molyneux-Seel, "Journey in Derism," 44, 49.

5. Southgate, *Narrative of a Tour*, 2:140-42; and Stead, "The Ali Ilahi Sect," 184-89.

6. Charles Wilson, *Handbook for Travellers*, 62. Cf. Walpole, *The Ansayrii and the Assassins*, 3:226, where the author states that there is a tradition that the Kurds are Armenians who were converted to Muhammadanism.

7. Charles Wilson, "Notes on the Physical and Historical Geography of Asia Minor," *Royal Geographical Society* 6 (June 1884): 313.

8. J. G. Taylor, "Journals of a Tour," 318; idem, "Travels in Kurdistan, with Notices of the Sources of the Eastern and Western Tigris, and Ancient Ruins in their neighborhood," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 35 (1865): 29-30; and Molyneux-Seel, "Journey in Derism," 44 and 67.

9. E. B. Soane, *Grammar of the Kurmanji or Kurdish Language* (London: Luzac, 1913), 5; and Ivanow, *Truth-Worshippers*, 9 n.1.

10. Moses Khorenantsi, *History of the Armenians*, trans. Robert W. Thomson (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978), 79-80; and J. G. Taylor, "Journal of a Tour," 318.

11. Taylor, "Journal of a Tour," 319.

12. Elsworth Huntington, "Through the Great Canon," 186-87.

13. Yaqut al-Hamawi, *Mujam al-Buldan*, 1st. ed. (Cairo: Matbaat al-Saada, 1323/1905), 1:190.

14. See *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, 1325-1354*, trans. H. A. R. Gibb, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 2:437.

15. E. Scott-Stevenson, *Our Ride Through Asia Minor* (London: Chapman and Hall limited, 1881), 218.

16. F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 1:516.

17. Molyneux-Seel, "Journey in Derism," 67.

18. For example see Kannenburg, quoted in Jacob, *Die Baktaschijje*, 36.

41. Arpee, *A History of Armenian Christianity*, 108.
42. Conybeare, *The Key of Truth*, 64.
43. Ahmad Ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, ed. Salah al-Din al-Munajjid (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1956), 1:248. According to the Armenian Chronicler Vartan (d. 1270), Smbat was captured by the Turkish commander Bugha and sent to Baghdad, where he died a martyr's death, having refused to recant the Christian faith. See Conybeare, *The Key of Truth*, 65. Cf. M. Canard, "Arminiya," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), 1:637.
44. Conybeare, *The Key of Truth*, 64–66, following relevant Armenian sources, especially Thomas Artsruni.
45. See Gregory Magistros in Appendix 3 of Conybeare, *The Key of Truth*, 145.
46. See the *History of Aristaces* by Vardapet of Lastivert in Appendix 2 of Conybeare, *The Key of Truth*, 134–36.
47. See Gregory Magistros, in Appendix 3 of Conybeare, *The Key of Truth*, 146–49.
48. Conybeare, *The Key of Truth*, 71.
49. Ibid., 111 and 139; R. Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 122; Ivanow, *Truth-Worshippers*, 51; A. A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire 324–1453* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 2:383 and 473; and David Marshall Lang, *The Armenians a People in Exile*. (London and Boston, Allen and Unwin, 1981), 165.
50. The *Chronicle* of Paul W. Meherean is still preserved in manuscript form in the library of San Lazaro, Venice. Conybeare quotes page 120 of this manuscript. See Conybeare, *The Key of Truth*, 71 and 82.
51. Ibid., 22–28, 49, 82.
52. Ibid., 76.
53. Ghowkas Inchichian, *Storagrowt'iwn Hayastaneayts* (Description of Armenia) (Venice: Monastery of San Lazaro, 1822), 113.
54. Conybeare, *The Key of Truth*, 23, 27, 49, 77, 78, 86, 125, 162, 164, and Appendix 5, 155.
55. Ibid., 22, 26, 163, 173, and Ivanow, *Truth-Worshippers*, 54.
56. White, "The Shia Turks," 231.
57. Conybeare, *The Key of Truth*, 163.
58. Ibid.; and Adjarian, "Gyorans et Thoumaris," 302.
59. See Frédéric Macler's comment on Adjarian's article, printed with it, 305.
60. Al-Sarraf, *al-Shabak*, 120–21; Ivanow, *Truth-Worshippers*, 55; Grenard, "Une Secte Religieuse," 517–18; and Petrushevsky, *Islam in Iran*, 264.
61. Conybeare, *The Key of Truth*, 49.
62. Ibid., 36 and 124.
63. See Above chapter 8 of this book on religious hierarchy; Stead, "The Ali Ilahi Sect," 186–87 and Ivanow, *Truth-Worshippers*, 55.
64. See chapter 8 of this book on religious hierarchy.
65. Molyneux-Seel, "Journey in Derism," 64–65.
66. White, "Alevi Turks," 698.
67. See chapters 19–20 of this book.
68. See *Maqatal al-Husayn wa Masra Ahl Baytihi wa Ashabihi fi Karbala al-Mushtahir bi Maqatal Abi Mikhnaf* (the killing of al-Husayn and members of his household and companions at Karbala, known as the Episode of the Killing of al-Husayn related by Abu Mikhnaf), (al-Najaf: Matbaat al-Ghadir, n.d.), 107–8.
69. See chapter 9 of this book on the Twelve Imams; Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa al-*

Nihaya, 1:321–26 and 355–67; al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 13:278–322; al-Maqdisi, *al-Bad wa al-Tarikh*, 77–78; W. C. Taylor, *History of Mohammedanism*, 31–33; LeStrange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, 175; and F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 2:319–36.

70. F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 2:327. In Mosul he is called Khidr Elias and the people observe a feast in his honor and make certain sweets for the occasion, called the halawa of Khidr Elias. For more information see Wensinck, "al-Khadir," 2:861–65.

71. Molyneux-Seel, "Journey in Derism," 66; and Pietro Della Valle, *Viaggi di Pietro Della Valle il pellegrino*. (Rome: Apresso Dragonelli, 1658), 2: 258.

72. Molyneux-Seel, "Journey in Derism," 66.

73. Grenard, "Une Secte Religieuse," 518.

74. F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 2:319–36; Dussaud, *Histoire et Religion des Nosairis*, 128–35.

75. Southgate, *Narrative of a Tour*, 1:196.

76. Molyneux-Seel, "Journey in Derism," 68.

77. Huntington, "Through the Great Canon," 188.

78. Von Luschen, "Early inhabitants of Western Asia," 241–44.

79. Dunmore, report, *Missionary Herald* 54 (April 1858): 113; and Parson, report dated 17 September 1857.

80. Michele Febure, *Théâtre de la Turquie* (Paris: E. Couterot, 1682), 45–46.

81. J. G. Taylor, "Journal of a Tour," 323.

82. Von Luschan, "Early Inhabitants of Western Asia," 229.

83. *Ibid.*, 241–44.

84. F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 1:157–58.

85. Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, 1:121.

86. F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 1:158.

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